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A closer look

Ominous recent headlines

The political support for modern passenger rail and Amtrak is deteriorating under the new administration in Washington. Politics is always a difficult subject to understand, but the political support for rail passenger service and transit seems to be disappearing down the rabbit hole of Alice in Wonderland. What was sensible and upright a few weeks ago is now upside down. What was upside down nonsense is now the upright truth. This is shown in some recent headlines in the media:

1. Amtrak President Gardner Resigns
2. Amtrak Should Be Privatized
3. USDOT Revokes Permission for Congestion Pricing Tolls in New York City
4. Officials Cut Planning Grant for High Speed Rail Between Dallas and Houston
5. Administration Launches Review of California's High-Speed Rail Spending
6. USDOT Grants to be Denied for Applications Supporting DEI Diversity Goals
7. "Want money for trains, tunnels, and bridges? Get married and make babies."
8. Administration Says it Will Take Over Renovation of Penn Station

The first three headlines (Amtrak President Gardner Resigns, Amtrak Should Be Privatized, and USDOT Revokes Permission for Congestion Pricing Tolls) are discussed in separate articles in this issue of the *Michigan Passenger*.

Officials Cut Planning Grant for High Speed Rail Between Dallas and Houston

This headline comes from a *Texas Tribune* article published on April 14. USDOT Secretary Duffy in a press release of April 14 announced "an agreement" between the USDOT and Amtrak to terminate the planning grant of $63.9 million. This refers to the Amtrak initiative of about 2023 to try and move this long stalled high speed rail project forward after private investors had fled. The grant was awarded as part of the Biden FRA Corridor Identification and Development Program, for which Amtrak hired a key staff member and must have prepared the grant application. That so soon after the Amtrak leader had been removed, Amtrak would "agree" to terminate this grant and remove themselves from the project seems fishy to say the least.

Administration Launches Review of California's High-Speed Rail Spending

This headline comes from the *Los Angeles Times* in an article published on February 20. The FRA will conduct a review of the California High Speed Rail Project, to which about $4 billion in federal funds is committed. The President has ridiculed the project many times as a waste of money. At a press conference in Los Angeles Union Station on February 20, Secretary Duffy made the public announcement to review the project, arguing that the expenditure was wasteful and unaccountable, statements indicating that this was really an effort to set the stage for ending the project.

The Blog *SFGATE* and the *LA Times* reported on a noisy reaction by the public. During the news conference, chants from protesters on the other side of a curtain between the news conference and the busy station interfered with the Secretary's comments. *STGATE* said that Duffy was booed "savagely" and a video of the conference sounded like a hostile sports match, with near-constant waves of boos and chants.

California's High-Speed Rail Authority refuted Duffy's criticisms in a statement. "Of approximately $13 billion spent on the project, $10.5 billion have

See ***Ominous headlines*** page 3

Potter Street Station in Saginaw Awaits Rescue

The Potter Street Station in East Saginaw, shown above in 2008, remains standing upright thanks to the heroic efforts of volunteers of the Saginaw Depot Preservation Society, the building's current owner. Built in 1881 by the Flint and Pere Marquette Railroad, the building was designed by New York architect Bradford Lee Gilbert. The last passenger train was a New York Central "Bee Liner" from Detroit, which ran through Saginaw to Bay City until discontinued about 1958. But the tracks remain and if we could ever get passenger service to the Saginaw/Bay City area of Michigan, there is a possibility that Amtrak could stop at this depot. Meanwhile, the valiant volunteers will have to continue repairing the roof and keep the building secure from vandals — and local cynics. (Wikipedia Commons, Dfcoe photo)

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The Michigan Passenger welcomes your comments and submissions on passenger rail issues. Comments, articles, and other materials sent for publication should be sent by email to jhguidinger1@yahoo.com. Clippings from newspapers, magazines, and electronic sources must include the publication's name and date. Photos sent by email must be in .jpg format. We reserve the right to edit all submissions.

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MICHIGAN SERVICES

Amtrak Train Schedules
Effective May 5, 2025
Chicago-Kalamazoo-Ann Arbor-Detroit-Pontiac
Chicago-Kalamazoo-East Lansing-Port Huron

Wolverine Service	Wolverine Service	Blue Water	Wolverine Service	Mile	Train Name		Wolverine Service	Blue Water	Wolverine Service	Wolverine Service
350	352	364	354		Train Number		351	365	353	355
Note A & B	Note B	Daily	Note B		Days of Operation		Note B	Daily	Note A & B	Note B
6:45a	2:15p	4:00p	5:50p	0	CHICAGO, IL, Un Sta (CT)	Ar	10:32a	11:45a	2:02p	10:40p
7:11a	↓	↓	↓	16	Hammond-Whiting, IN (CT)	↑	↑	↑	1:15p	9:54p
9:04a	See Note B.	6:10p	See Note B.	62	New Buffalo, MI (ET)		See Note B.	11:24a	1:21p	10:02p
9:29a	4:52p	6:32p	8:24p	89	Niles, MI		11:04a	11:04a	1:01p	9:42p
9:40a	↓	6:43p	↓	102	Dowagiac, MI		10:52a	10:52a	↑	9:29p
10:14a	5:26p	7:11p	8:58p	138	Kalamazoo, MI		10:26a	10:26a	12:28p	9:00p
10:56a	6:03p	7:38p	9:35p	160	Battle Creek, MI		10:00a	10:00a	12:01p	8:33p
↓	↓	9:00p	↓	208	East Lansing, MI		↑	8:54a	↑	↑
		9:37p		238	Durand, MI			8:08a		
		10:08p		256	Flint, MI			7:35a		
		10:34p		274	Lapeer, MI	↓		7:08a		
		11:31p	↓	319	PORT HURON, MI	Dp	↑	6:20a	↑	↑
↓	↓		10:03p	184	Albion, MI		8:15a		10:58a	7:37p
11:51a	6:55p		10:28p	208	Jackson, MI		7:51a		10:23a	7:00p
12:28p	7:35p		11:08p	243	Ann Arbor, MI		7:14a		9:53a	6:29p
12:57p	8:11p		11:27p	271	Dearborn, MI		6:44a		9:35a	6:11p
1:25p	8:44p		12:11a	281	DETROIT, MI		6:26a		9:12a	5:48p
1:49p	9:05p		12:34a	292	Royal Oak, MI		6:03a		9:04a	5:41p
1:57p	9:12p		12:41a	296	Troy, MI	↓	5:56a		8:50a	5:28p
2:11p	9:29p		1:01a	304	PONTIAC, MI	Dp	5:43a			

Will NOT run on certain Dates. See Notes A & B. — Read Down / Read Up

Amtrak Train Schedule
Effective October 6, 2023
Chicago-Grand Rapids

Pere Marquette	Mile	Train Name		Pere Marquette
370		Train Number		371
Daily		Days of Operation		Daily
6:30p	0	Dp CHICAGO, IL, Un Sta (CT)	Ar	9:08a
9:14p	89	↓ St. Joe-Benton Harbor, MI (ET)	↑	8:10a
9:50p	116	↓ Bangor, MI	↑	7:32a
10:33p	151	↓ Holland, MI	↑	6:49a
11:34p	176	Ar GRAND RAPIDS, MI	Dp	6:00a

Read Down / Read Up

These schedules are provided for planning purposes only and may not show recent time changes. Always consult with Amtrak at AMTRAK.COM or 1-800-USA-RAIL when making reservations.

NOTE A - Trains 350 and 353 will NOT operate on certain week days for track construction work. Trains 350 and 353 will NOT operate on Mondays through Thursdays between May 5 and October 31, with the following exceptions during which they WILL operate: May 26 (Memorial Day), June 19 (Juneteenth), between June 27 and August 3 (Mid Summer), and September 1 (Labor Day)

NOTE B - Trains 350, 351, 352,353, 354, and 355 will NOT operate on June 3 and June 4, OR they will NOT operate on June 10 and June 11 for track replacement. (The track work is weather dependent.)

Printed by the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers - May 1, 2025.

Join us at MARP.ORG for better trains.

Letters & emails
Appreciate Scott Hercik

Editor:
Scott (Hercik, see page 3) was one of my best friends for decades. We first met when he joined our rail group at Michigan DOT in the 1970s. After I left, he took over the top position there for many years before heading to Amtrak in DC and subsequently the Appalachian Regional Commission. He and I shared a love of trains and planes. We also shared a love of travel, and he managed to do quite a bit of that domestically and internationally. One of our most memorable trips together was riding an Ann Arbor Railroad freight train during a bitter cold February night from Owosso to Frankfort while we were at MDOT. Upon arrival in the morning the crew of the Ann Arbor car-ferry treated us to a sumptuous breakfast on the boat while it was waiting to sail across Lake Michigan. Scott was always fun to talk with and be with, and I regret that in recent years I did not see him more often. And, of course, we didn't just talk about trains and planes, we also talked about our beloved Michigan State Spartans. My love and best wishes to Jeanette and Scott's wonderful family with which he was blessed.

Kevin McKinney
February 08, 2025

MARP STATION REPRESENTATIVES
Chuck Merckel, Coordinator (734-330-0281)

Station	Staff	MARP Volunteer
Albion	Bus	Matthew Murawski
Ann Arbor	Amtrak	Clark Charnetski
Bangor	None	J. P. Descamp
Battle Creek	Amtrak	James Donahue
Chicago	Amtrak	Robert (Bob) Donahue
Dearborn	Amtrak	Mary Jo Durivage
Detroit	Amtrak	Greg Ptucha/Roberta Deering
Dowagiac	None	Matt Money
Durand	Museum	Mary Stone
East Lansing	Caretkr	John Boyse
Flint	Bus	Barb Westcott
Grand Rapids	Caretkr	Mit Renroc
Holland	None	Nathan Nietering
Jackson	Caretkr	Tom Schindler
Kalamazoo	Caretkr	Warren Fritz
Lapeer	None	Jim Slater
New Buffalo	None	Rich Knoll
Niles	Caretkr	Jack Kessler
Pontiac	Bus	Robert Tischbein
Port Huron	None	T. J. Gaffney
Royal Oak	None	David Roberts
St Joseph	None	Todd Schultz
Toledo, OH	Amtrak	James Parsons
Traverse City	None	Carolyn Ulstad
Troy	None	Thomas VandeGrift

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Former MDOT Manager of Passenger Rail dies

Scott Hercik

Scott Hercik was the Michigan Department of Transportation Manager of the Passenger Rail program during the 1980s. This was during the days when Michigan was a progressive state involved in many efforts to improve not only transportation matters, but other living conditions that affect us all.

Scott was born in Alma, Michigan, the son of the late James Joseph Hercik and Luan Olive. He was a 1969 graduate of Alma High School and went on in 1979 to earn a Bachelor of Science degree at Michigan State University, where he played the trumpet in the Spartan Marching Band. During his career Scott became a nationally recognized transportation expert from many years of employment with the Michigan DOT, Amtrak, the Federal Appalachian Regional Commission. and the Smithsonian Institution. His love of travel and his adventurous spirit shaped a career and personal life dedicated to seeing the world, and Scott enjoyed sharing those travel experiences and memories with his family and friends.

James "Scott" Hercik passed away February 4, 2025 in Reston, Virginia, at the age of 74 from cancer. He is survived by his mother, Luan Olive Hercik; his wife of 43 years, Jeanette Hercik; daughters, Katie Rediger and Christie Manthey; five grandchildren; sister Jean Lustgarten; and sister-in-law, Charlotte Kierst. A memorial mass celebrated his life on February 15, 2025, at St. Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Easton. Maryland, followed by burial in the St. Peter and Paul Cemetery.

Amtrak CEO Gardner Resigns

Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner
(Amtrak Photo)

Progressive Railroading and *Railway Age* reported on March 20th that Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner abruptly resigned on March 19th. In a statement on the Amtrak website, Gardner said "I'm stepping down as CEO to ensure that Amtrak continues to enjoy the full faith and confidence of this administration. I am so proud of what the Amtrak team has accomplished to bring passenger rail service to more people and places across the country over these past 16 years, and I thank the board for their trust and support." Amtrak declined to comment further on his resignation. Gardner was named the railroad's CEO in 2022.

No further information is available as to the reasons for his resignation. But *Reuters* and others report that the current national administration forced Gardner to step down. Gardner's departure occurs a few weeks after billionaire tech mogul Elon Musk, appointed by the president to oversee the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), told attendees at a Morgan Stanley technology conference that Amtrak should be privatized.

MARP's interactions with Gardner were always positive. He was extremely well spoken, very personable, and willing to talk. Before a new CEO is appointed, long time Amtrak Board Chair Anthony R. Coscia will serve as an interim CEO. A successor has not yet been publicly announced.

The Amtrak Board, released a statement on the leadership transition, saying that as "Stephen departs today, we thank him for his 16 years of service to Amtrak. We will build on his accomplishments and wish him every success. We look forward to working with…… Secretary Duffy as we build the world-class passenger rail system this country deserves."

Railway Age adds that Gardner was appointed CEO in 2022, succeeding William J. Flynn. He had served as the President of Amtrak since 2020. He was Executive Vice President/Chief Operating and Commercial Officer (2019-2020) and held several other executive positions in policy development, infrastructure investment, technology planning, and marketing. *Railway Age* readers named Gardner one of 10 Influential Rail Leaders in 2022.

Early in his transportation career, he held various positions with Guilford Rail System (which transitioned to Pan Am Railways and now CSX) and the Buckingham Branch Railroad in Virginia. He is widely recognized as the principal author of PRIIA (Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008). When Joe Biden, a staunch Amtrak supporter and long-time Amtrak customer, became President-elect, one of his first actions was to make Stephen Gardner the Amtrak President.

Railway Age Capitol Hill Contributing Editor Frank N. Wilner said, "Few Amtrak presidents in the passenger railroad's more than half-century of existence match Gardner's devotion to the brand and its employees. Self-described as a political liberal—he previously held senior Democratic Senate staff positions—Gardner becomes another casualty of the current administration. *Railway Age* contributing editor David Peter Alan said that the future for Amtrak "could be grim."

Ominous headlines . . . continued from page 1

been funded exclusively by the State of California." "Every dollar of the project is accounted for and has been thoroughly reviewed by the independent Office of the Inspector General [whose] sole focus is improving oversight and accountability of the California high-speed rail project."

USDOT Grants to be Paused or Denied for Applications Supporting DEI Goals

This expresses a long term goal of conservative groups against DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, certain environmental matters, "woke" gender ideology, as well as other initiatives.) The Office of Management and Budget (OMB), attempted in January to pause all federal grants and loans (including those for rail and transit projects) to wash out DEI initiatives from the applications. After considerable backlash, OMB then announced on January 28, that it will pause some, but not all grants made by the Biden administration.

Although the pause is supposedly limited, it raises serious concerns about potential delays or cancellations of transit and rail infrastructure projects, especially those that were part of the previous administration's initiatives. If every single project must be reviewed and reconsidered, there could be very lengthy delays. And a strong opportunity would exist to end projects deemed unfavorable by the White House.

Of most immediate concern is whether DOT will allow the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the FRA to continue to reimburse legally binding commitments without interruption. In Fiscal Year 2024, the FTA provided $20.9 billion for public transit programs and the FRA provided $16.3 billion for passenger and freight rail programs.

"Want Money for Trains, Tunnels, and Bridges? Get Married and Make Babies."

This is a headline from the *New York Daily News* published on February 1, 2025. It refers to a pronouncement in an order from Secretary Duffy in on the day after he was confirmed on January 29. The order said that in reviewing grant applications, the USDOT will "give preference to communities with marriage and birth rates higher than the national average." The relationship of trains, tunnels, and bridges to marriage and having children is not known to MARP. But if these words need to be included in a grant application to ensure success with the USDOT, then we suppose they could be added without harm. Perhaps a few dollars could be diverted for an educational program in a temporary classroom alongside a bridge construction site or in a nearby town hall. But the Alice in Wonderland aspect of this grant criteria casts an aura of unrealism and an unfavorable tint to all applications to be submitted to USDOT Secretary Duffy, who is a former reality TV star.

Administration Says it Will Take Over Renovation of Penn Station

This is from a headline in an article in the *New York Times* published on April 17. This refers to the long-planned $7 billion project to expand New York's Pennsylvania Station to handle additional traffic after the two new Hudson River Tunnels are completed and new Amtrak and commuter trains come surging into the already over-crowded station. After years of study, the MTA with about 65 percent of the passengers in the station, was designated the manager of the project. After removing the MTA as the project manager, Secretary Duffy in his press release did not miss an opportunity to disparage the MTA, who with New York Governor Kathy Hochul, has sued Duffy to allow Congestion Pricing tolls to continue in Manhattan.

Duffy's plans for renovating the station involve putting Amtrak in charge of the renovations. The plans will probably hinge on making cuts to save as much money as possible. Duffy said, "By putting taxpayers first, we're ensuring every dollar is spent wisely to create a transit hub all Americans can take pride in." The *Times* reports that Governor Hochul said "I want to thank the president and Secretary Duffy for taking on the sole responsibility to deliver the beautiful new $7 billion station that New Yorkers deserve." There is sarcasm here.

AM NY said on April 17, that this change likely crushed the MTA's carefully negotiated plans for a revitalized Penn Station. The decision means that the MTA's multi-billion-dollar reconstruction concepts, including a new 250,000-square-foot single-level concourse that would increase space, are likely scrapped.

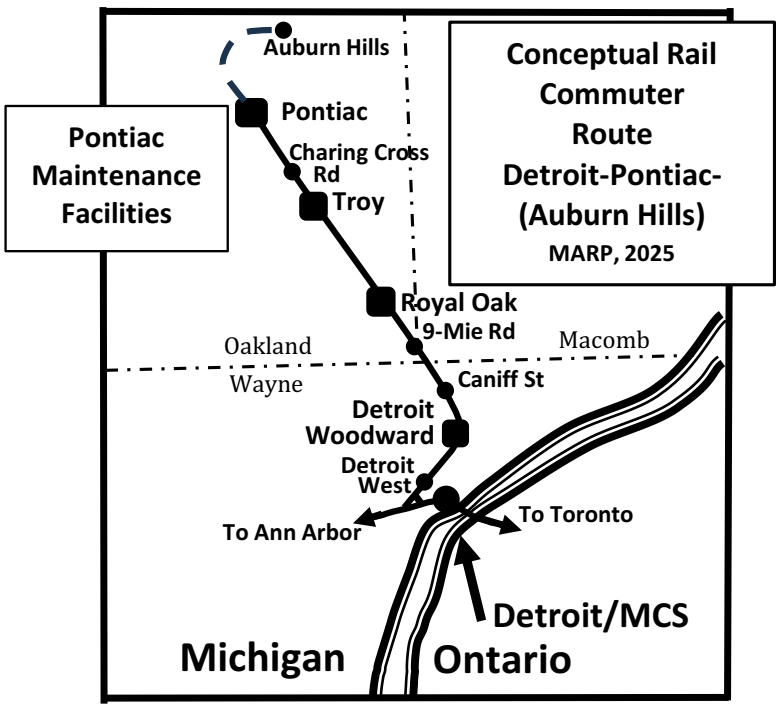
The Second of a Series of Articles on the Possibilities

A Detroit Area Commuter System

A Possible Revival of the Detroit-Pontiac Trains?

Introduction

This is the second article on a possible rail commuter system for Detroit. This article explores the Detroit-Pontiac Route. Unlike the Detroit-Ann Arbor-Jackson route discussed in the first article, a small but significant commuter operation once existed on this 26-mile route between Pontiac and Detroit. Operated originally by the Grand Trunk Western (GTW) Railroad and, during the final years, under Southeast Michigan Transit Authority (SEMTA) funding and management, this commuter service was quite popular and ridership was growing for many years before it was discontinued in 1983.



The Detroit-Pontiac route is shown on the above map. In Detroit the route terminated at the GTW terminal on Brush Street near the Detroit lakefront. The station, the coachyard and access line are gone today as part of clearing of many acres for the Renaissance Center complex. (The present Grand Trunk Pub on Woodward Avenue was a downtown ticket office for the GTW.) During the last few years, the trains operated out of a small temporary building on the north side of the Renaissance Center.

Grand Trunk Western Table 150, shown upper right, is taken from the *Official Guide to the Railways* for October 1958. Detroit bound Trains 75, 77, and 79 and Pontiac bound trains 70, 72, and 74 were the commuter trains. Durand bound train 19 was also a local train to Durand. The other trains were part of GTW's fleet of intercity trains and locals that served the Chicago and Grand Rapids/Muskegon passenger market of the time. This was the basic schedule for this route for about 50 years, from after World War I up until 1971. The intercity trains must have been available for the commuter passengers to use if needed by paying the step up or regular fare.

On May 1, 1971 Amtrak took over the intercity passenger system. The Amtrak mandate did not include commuter trains, and therefore, the intercity trains in Table 150 were stripped away leaving only the three round trip commuter trains on this route.

In 1977 SEMTA purchased the locomotives and cars and took over management of the commuter line. About this time SEMTA also began assisting the GTW on the costs of these trains, similar to the assistance provided to rail commuter operators in other cities in the US. Ridership under SEMTA began to grow and another round trip was added giving the commuters a small but respectable system of four trains every week day into Detroit in the morning and four trains out in the afternoon. SEMTA buses ran on the route and bused served as downtown distributors from the downtown station. (The fourth train was discontinued about 1980.)

But it all came to an abrupt end in 1983, when the Federal Government reduced the assistance paid to SEMTA for transit services by $16.6 million annually. Because the losses per passenger were much higher for the rail commuters, SEMTA decided immediately that it would use the $2.1 million allocated for the trains to reduce the deficit. Several bus routes and other services were also cut to meet the lower level of funding.

On Friday, October 14, 1983, MARP, under Chair Dietrich Bergmann, with the financial support of the commuters, filed an injunction against SEMTA to halt the discontinuance of the commuter trains until the matter could be studied further and new funding sources explored. But on Monday the judge ruled in SEMTA's favor and the trains made their last runs on October 17, 1983.

Since then, the equipment, stations, and much of the infrastructure of the commuter system has disappeared. We can only imagine what would have existed today if the SEMTA commuter trains had continued and been gradually up-graded over time as has been done in Detroit's neighboring cities of Toronto and Chicago.

GTW Table 150 - DETROIT-CHICAGO-GRAND RAPIDS-MUSKEGON-GRAND HAVEN

57	79	77	75	19	21	Miles	*April 27, 1958*	70	22	72	122	74	54	56
.....	@ ʘ	@ ʘ	@ ʘ	.....	.....	.....	*(Eastern Time)*	@ ʘ	.....	@ ʘ	.....	@ ʘ	.....	.....
P M	P M	P M	P M	P M	P M	.....	Leave Arrive	A M	A M	A M	A M	A M	A M	P M
x11 15	! 6 10	! 5 25	! 5 05	! 4 45	x1 40	0	! .....Detroit.....	7 35	7 45	8 10	8 25	8 40	9 30	6 00
11 25	6 19	5 35	5 15	4 54	1 49	4.1	! ..Milwaukee Junction	7 24	7 35	7 59	8 10	8 29	9 19	5 47
- - -	6 23	5 41	5 20	4 58	f1 53	6.6	! .....Highland Park....	7 17	d7 24	7 51	d8 02	8 24	f9 11	f5 40
- - -	6 31	5 50	5 29	5 06	- - -	10.9	.....Ferndale.....	7 08	- - -	7 43	- - -	8 14	f9 05	*k* 5 35
- - -	6 33	5 53	5 32	5 08	- - -	11.9	.....Pleasant Ridge.....	7 04	- - -	7 39	- - -	8 12	- - -	- - -
11 41	6 35	5 56	5 35	5 15	2 05	13.2	! .....Royal Oak.....	7 02	7 16	7 36	7 54	8 09	9 02	5 32
11 50	6 45	6 07	5 46	5 30	2 12	17.2	! .....Birmingham.....	6 51	7 08	7 25	7 48	8 00	8 48	5 23
- - -	6 49	6 12	5 51	5 34	- - -	19.9	.....Charring Cross.....	f6 46	- - -	f7 20	- - -	7 55	f8 40	*k* 5 17
- - -	6 51	6 15	5 53	5 36	- - -	21.2	.....Bloomfield Hills.....	f6 43	- - -	f718	- - -	7 53	f8 37	*k* 5 15
12 20	7 00	6 25	6 00	5 50	2 30	26.3	! .....Pontiac.....	! 6 35	! 6 55	! 7 10	s7 35	! 7 45	! 8 30	x5 08
P M	P M	P M	P M	P M	P M			A M	A M	A M	A M	A M	A M	P M
To Chicago & Muskegon				To Durand	To Chicago & Muskegon				From Chicago & Muskegon		From Chicago		From Chicago	From Chicago & Muskegon

Source - Official Guide, Oct. 1958, pg 1043

SYMBOLS
x- Daily
! Daily, except Sunday
! - Monday-Friday only
k - Saturday only
s - Sunday only
f - Stops on signal
d - Stops for passeng. from Durand and west
ʘ - Will not run on certain holidays
! - No checked bag
x - Coupon station

Possible Reinstatement of the Detroit-Pontiac Route

It is suggested that commuter service be reinstated on this route. This would be essentially the revival of the former SEMTA Commuter trains. A conceptual list of the stations is shown in the table at right. It is assumed that the existing Amtrak stations at Detroit, Royal Oak, Troy, and Pontiac would be modified to serve commuters. Since none of the other stations from the SEMTA system remain, all the other stations would need to be newly established to serve commuter trains. Today SEMTA has been replaced by the Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART). Perhaps this organization could be the authority to seek funding for the new trains from local and federal grants.

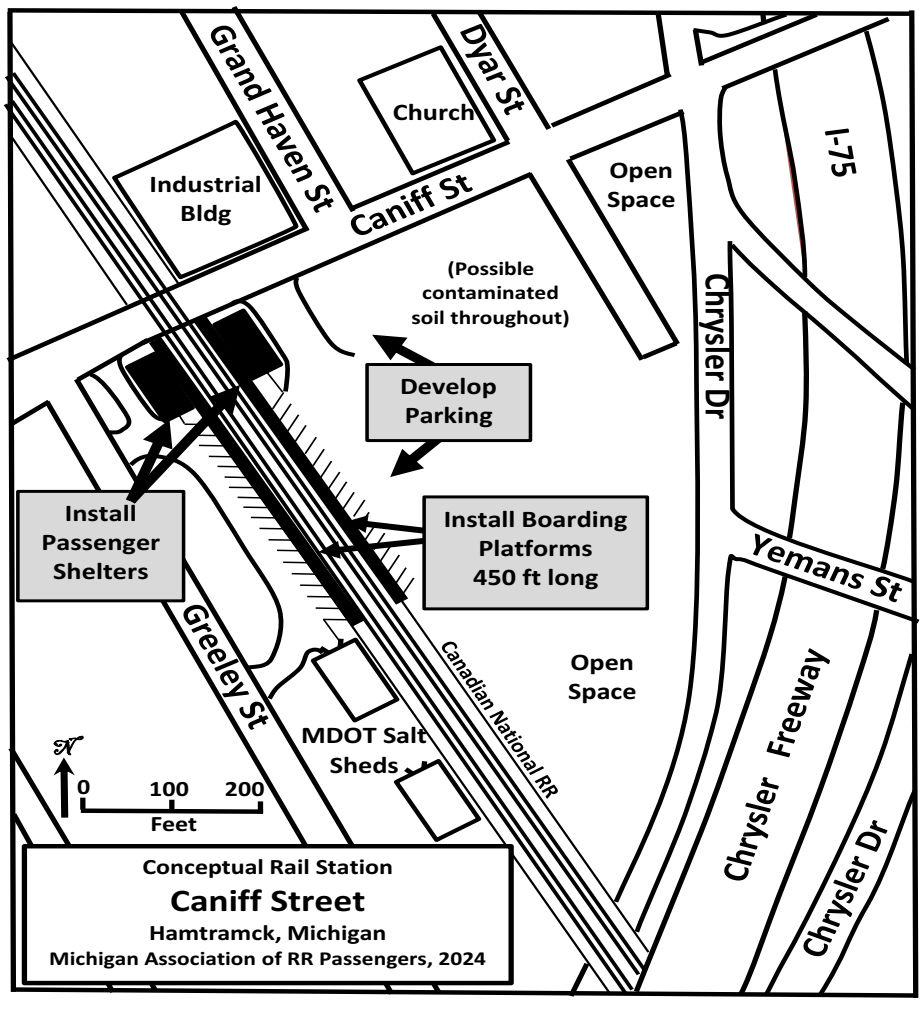
The route in the Detroit area would need to be adjusted. The former GTW railroad line from Milwaukee Junction to downtown has been removed. Today the route would likely run from Milwaukee Junction through the Amtrak Woodward Avenue Station in Detroit. The commuter trains could terminate near Woodward Avenue or continue to a termination at or near Ford's Michigan Central. If the trains were to run eventually as a regional rail system through to the west on the Ann Arbor commuter line (see February Michigan Passenger), then it would be difficult to serve Michigan Central Station with trains from Pontiac. The situation in Detroit would need to be the subject of a detailed study.

Servicing of the trains would likely be in Pontiac at the Canadian National (CN) yards, the location of the servicing location for the former SEMTA trains. Since the former servicing facilities reportedly have been modified and sold, new servicing facilities would have to be built for the commuter service.

Continued on page 5

Conceptual Station List
Detroit-Pontiac (Auburn Hills)
Michigan Association of RR Passengers - 2025

Miles From MCS	Station	Location	RR	Notes
0.0	Detroit MCS	Vernor Highway	CPKC	Adjacent to Mich Central
2.8	Detroit West	Clark Avenue	CN	At Michigan Avenue
5.0	Detroit Woodward	Amtrak Station	CN	New Center Detroit
7.5	Canif Road	Hamtramck	CN	Possible brownfield site
12.8	9-Mile Road	Ferndale	CN	NW quad of road crossing
15.1	Royal Oak	Amtrak Station	CN	West 11-Mile Road
19.3	Troy	Amtrak Station	CN	Troy Transit Center
21.8	Charing Cross Rd	Bloomfield Hills	CN	Old SEMTA station site
27.4	Pontiac	Amtrak Station	CN	Orchard Lake Road
32.9	Auburn Hills	Joslyn Avenue	CN	At Walton Blvd



An Exit Interview with DOT Secretary Buttigieg

(This is a summary from an interesting article by Adam Wren published on January 16, 2025 in POLITICAL Magazine.)

Pete Buttigieg

After leaving office, former U.S. Secretary of Transportation, Pete Buttigieg, defended his methods of implementing the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) of 2021. The BIL contained 1.2 trillion dollars of grants primarily for improving the national transportation infrastructure. However, he recognized that it didn't result in enough votes in the 2024 election to to keep the presidency in Democratic Party hands.

In the 2020 Democratic primary, Joe Biden attacked Pete Buttigieg in a now-deleted, scornful digital ad called "Pete's Record." But by the end of 2024, nearly five years later, as 12,300 bridges are under construction or repaired funded by the BIL, Biden warmly compared Buttigieg to his late son Beau. Pete oversaw the legislation's implementation as Transportation Secretary.

Both Biden and Buttigieg expressed frustration at not being able to start building more projects before the 2024 election. In a *USA Today* interview published on January 8, 2025, Biden said "We would've been a hell of a lot better off had we been able to go much harder at getting some of these projects in the ground quicker."

Buttigieg said that the president was expressing the impatience that both felt by the lack of recognition and credit that this type of work deserved. The complexity of infrastructure work means that it takes longer than a political cycle to get the work completed, meaning that two or three presidents may be in power before the work is completed.

After Buttigieg visited South Bend in December last year and rode the South Shore Line into Chicago, he was asked why it took so long to double track the line. He acknowledged that this early project took far too long to get started and completed. He spoke later of how he worked to speed up these projects.

When asked about polling that shows most Americans credit Trump almost as much as Biden for this law, he compared it to the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The political life of Obama's ACA evolved from ridicule in the minds of many people to widespread acceptance in eight years. He thought that the BIL and the work still underway will come to be accepted over time.

He said that a problem they had all along is that they were competing with a lot of other things for attention in a media saturated environment. And good news is no news. News stories that cover unambiguously and uncontroversially good things command far less attention. Bad news and controversy always dominate the news media. But he thought that the massive improvements to the national transportation infrastructure, which are just starting to produce results, will come to be accepted and matter very much over time.

Buttigieg pointed out that of the 66,000 projects that were announced during his time, about 16,000 of them are complete from a federal perspective. (Since the initial interview, per the USDOT, 72,000 projects are underway and 22,000 are complete.) He noted that what is probably the biggest transportation project for which Biden is responsible is the new rail tunnels between New York and New Jersey. This project will span perhaps up to four presidents before it's fully complete.

When asked to define his post-election public comments that salvation will come at the local and state level, Buttigieg responded that all the grants that were launched in the last two or three years using funds from the BIL are now led by state, local. tribal, or regional authorities.

He commented on the frustrating delays that slow all projects down. He said that he tripled the pace of getting grant agreements funded by the USDOT compared to the previous administration. By some measures, he said he cut in half the number of projects requiring a full environmental impact statement. Although gaining a lot of ground on the time needed for pre-construction planning, infrastructure work still takes a long time to complete.

Concerning the current president, he said that in terms of societal, political, and civic trust he is very worried. But, on some fronts, he thought that there was a "durability to what we spent the first half of this decade doing." Much of this work will bear fruit in the second half of the decade. The current president will be in office until almost the end of the decade. He thought that it may be maddening to contemplate that the people who actively opposed these projects scooping up the credit for it. But the most important thing isn't the credit, it's that it happened.

Had he talked to his successor at the Transportation Department, Sean Duffy? Yes. They had a very nice conversation wherein he told him that he would have the best job in the federal government with some of the best civil servants. Is Duffy qualified for the job? Buttigieg said that Duffy had the confidence of the President, which is the most important qualification.

When asked to define his post-election public comments that salvation will come at the local and state level, Buttigieg responded that all the grants that were launched in the last two or three years using funds from the BIL are now led by state, local. tribal, or regional authorities. Now so much depends on how they pick it up and run with it. The leaders at the local levels of government are much more offline. They must deal with reality, not conspiracies. He compared it to climate change in the first Trump term, where cities came together and didn't want to wait for their national capital on things like climate. He thought that the dynamic in the BIL projects will come to the forefront, whether the White House understands or not.

When asked about dealing with disruptive conspiracy theories, he said that it may be the biggest problem of our time, but truth remains truth and falsehood remains falsehood and we must find new ways to pick through it. We can't make good decisions, whether it's in public life or in our personal lives, without good access to true information.

On dealing with Elon Musk, for whom at least two of his industries the USDOT regulates. An agency like the DOT must treat everybody fairly. The DOT has to deal with companies and entities based on things like safety and what the law says, not who is pals with the owner of the company. He added that it was not unusual for wealthy and well-connected people to also be very powerful. He thought that the real question is, how our public institutions can continue serving all people fairly.

Asked whether he left the transportation system better off than what he found in 2021, he was absolutely certain that every part was better. What he found involved two difficult facets: the acute set of enormous emergencies and the long term decay. The emergencies he confronted and he was proud of what he did to solve them. Airline passengers have more rights than when he got here. Our ports move more goods than was possible than when he got there. The trajectory of all kinds of long-term trends, from the condition of our highways and bridges to the number of air traffic controllers, has gone from getting worse when he

See ***Exit interview*** on page 6

Detroit Commuter System continued from previous page

Caniff Street Station

A conceptual site sketch (page 4) has been prepared for a possible commuter station on Caniff Street in Hamtramck. This station site would be on a vacant, former industrial site on the east side of the tracks between Caniff Street and Interstate Highway 75. This location may be a brownfield site with contaminated soil that would have to be remediated. The surrounding land use is primarily industrial with extensive residential developments to the west and east of I-75.

Passenger shelters and boarding platforms would be installed on both sides of the tracks on the south side of Caniff Street. These platforms could be located on the CN railroad right-of-way, which has two mainline tracks at this location. Most of the site east of the tracks would be developed for commuter parking. The site has very good access from I-75.

9-Mile Road Station

A second conceptual site sketch (at right) has been prepared for a possible commuter station on 9-Mile Road in Ferndale. This station would be in commercial developments along the north side of 9-Mile Road, a busy local street. The surrounding land use is primarily commercial and light industrial, with extensive residential uses at further distances.

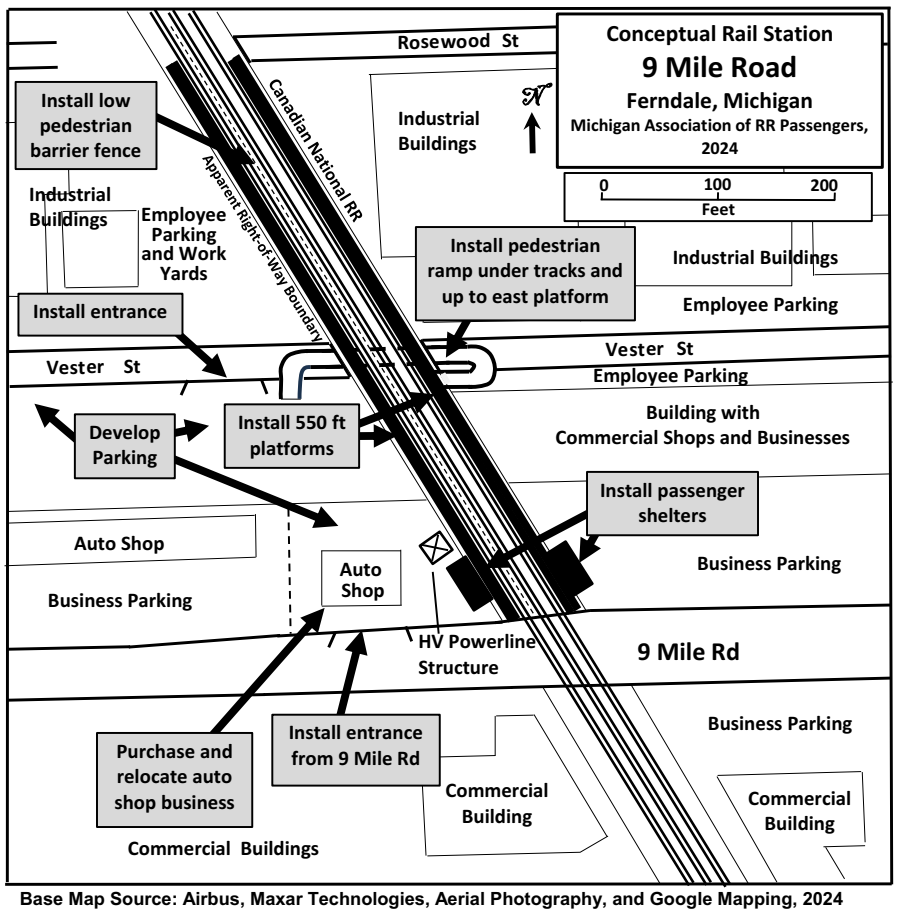
Passenger shelters and boarding platforms would be installed on both sides of the tracks on the north side of 9-Mile Road. The platforms could be located on the CN Railroad right-of-way, which has three mainline tracks at this location. The platforms shown in the site sketch are about 500 feet long and passengers would need a place to cross the tracks in addition to crossing along 9-Mile Road. A relatively simple underground crossing could be built at Vester Street where the railroad is elevated somewhat on fill. Commuter parking would be installed west of the tracks on what is apparently vacant land. However, at least one commercial business on 9-Mile Road would have to be relocated to provide access from this street and provide adequate commuter parking. Federal funding has favorable provisions for the relocation of businesses.

Extension to Auburn Hills

Extensive new urban development has occurred northeast of Pontiac. A CN freight line accesses this area which could be developed for commuter service to a new station site, perhaps where the railroad crosses Walton Boulevard.

Conclusion

This review is a concept of what could happen if commuter service would be reintroduced to the Detroit-Pontiac route. Funding and political will would be needed to allow Detroit to join Chicago and Toronto in having a commuter rail system that would strengthen the personal livability of the entire urban area.



Base Map Source: Airbus, Maxar Technologies, Aerial Photography, and Google Mapping, 2024

Old myth returns

An Amtrak train descends down grade after crossing the Hell Gate Bridge (Amtrak photo).

The old idea about privatizing Amtrak resurfaces

Billionaire Eldon Musk, who has been cutting up the federal government lately for the President, called for the privatization of Amtrak. The *New York Times* reported on March 6 that Amtrak may have come up against one of its most "aggressive and powerful skeptics yet." The *Times* reports that while speaking at a tech conference organized by the bank Morgan Stanley on March 1, Musk called Amtrak "embarrassing," saying that privatization was the only way to fix it.

Musk stated that in China passengers ride "amazing" bullet trains at 186 miles per hour and that when he came back to the US to ride Amtrak, he found the trains to be "sad." He asked conference attendees to not ride Amtrak. The President has not called for privatizing Amtrak, and the White House did not immediately reply to a request from the *Times* to comment on Musk's assertions.

The myth that privatization would solve all its problems has shadowed Amtrak since its founding in 1971. Musk conveniently overlooks that the Chinese trains, while modern and fast and well patronized, are subsidized by the communist government and produce large public debts.

On March 5, Amtrak published a "white paper" pointing out several facts against privatization including:

• Amtrak set all time ridership and revenue records in 2024 and is close to profitability.

• Since acquiring the Northeast Corridor (NEC) in 1976, Amtrak has made great improvement but there are billions of dollars of investments still to be made

• The number of all types of trains operating on the NEC has increased from 1,000 each weekday in 1976 to over 2,000 now

• Companies expressing an interest in entering the US intercity passenger rail market are subsidiaries of Chinese or European governments, and not private for-profit companies

• In 1994 Britian conveyed its passenger rail infrastructure to a newly formed private entity and franchised train operations to several private operators. But in 2002 after a series of fatal mishaps, inadequate financial investment in the tracks, and the insolvency of the infrastructure company, the rail network was returned to government ownership under the name Network Rail. In 2024 Britain enacted legislation to cancel the franchises as they came up for rebidding and return the entire system to government operation. After 30 years, the privatization experiment was deemed a dismal failure.

• In 2008, in response to a congressional directive, Amtrak sought bids from private companies to develop high speed rail service. However, not a single bid was received.

• In 2016 a similar solicitation from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for a private operator resulted in only one bid; this from the Chinese government-owned railroad. The bid was based on the US and state governments providing most of the funding.

• In 2017 a solicitation from the FRA to take over up to three long distance trains with subsidies of 90 percent of the current funding for the trains did not result in a single bid.

• Brightline West, which is building a new line between the Los Angeles urban area and Las Vegas, abandoned its effort to use only private financing. They accepted a $3 billon dollar grant from the FRA in 2024 and are presently seeking additional funding to complete construction of the line. Brightline will also use the significant benefits of the public interstate highway right-of-way for much of its route.

The *Times* sums up the privatization argument by quoting Louis Thompson, a member of the team that developed Amtrak and who later supervised its budget. Thompson said Mr. Musk's privatization proposal was "not possible." The Times added that Thompson said that Americans did not expect subways or buses to make money, and they should not expect anything more from Amtrak. Amtrak provides a service that is "inherently not profitable," Mr. Thompson said, adding that "this is the uniform model for most rail passenger service worldwide."

Rail Passenger Association President and CEO Jim Mathews told National Public Radio in late March that he believes Amtrak CEO Gardner would have fought an effort to privatize the railroad. Mathews said that to privatize Amtrak is, by definition, to dismantle it, and he didn't think Gardner would have stood for that.

Meanwhile, the Alliance of Passenger Rail New Entrants in Europe (ALLRAIL), which represents private passenger railway operators and ticket vendors in Europe, has taken issue with Amtrak's recently issued white paper on privatization. ALLRAIL noted that in the European Union passenger-rail operators no longer receive directly awarded subsidies; they must bid to provide services partly paid for by taxpayers. Both publicly and privately owned companies can participate in the bidding process. "In the European Union, private and public and private operators compete with each other by enhancing service, punctuality, amenities and more," ALLRAIL stated. "Without any similar competitive pressure, Amtrak will lack the incentive to innovate."

Exit interview with Pete Buttigieg continued from page 5

got here to getting better when he left. There's always much unfinished business, but he is absolutely convinced that he is leaving America's transportation system in much better condition.

Asked about moving to Traverse City, Michigan, and commuting back and forth to Washington, did he think more cabinet officials and cabinet agencies should be based outside of DC? He answered, "not necessarily." He did what made sense for his family. It was doable, but not sustainable. He thought every one of his colleagues on the cabinet met this problem in a different way. It wasn't until the second year that they actually met in the same room. Things improved remarkably when they were able to talk with each other. The challenge for anybody in these roles is to lead a team you have to be part of a team, and you need to be around your team, and if that team is based in Washington, you need to be in Washington. At the same time, if you're in Washington too long, there's a risk that you can begin to care more about the things in Washington than what matters to most people who live far distant from Washington.

What is on his "to-do" list for the future? He said that he got what he asked for at Christmas - a splitting maul and a new axe. So, he will be chopping a lot of wood and being outside a little more. He wants to spend more time engaged with ideas and with students.

When asked if he will adopt Michigan State or the University of Michigan, or is he going to stay with Notre Dame, he dodged the question somewhat. I love my new home in Traverse City, but I can't ever forget where I came from. He recently went to a Notre-Dame home game with Indiana and sat in the "nosebleed" section. His toes were cold, but he thought the game was great.

What will he tell his children (he has twin girls) when they are older about the last four years? Hopefully in our travels, I can point out something, and say to them, "I worked on that, and that's one of the reasons why I was away so much when you were young."

Buttigieg also spoke about his future plans that, at the time of the interview, included a Michigan gubernatorial bid in 2026 or a possible 2028 presidential campaign.

MARP meets in Dearborn

Above: Nikki Johnson and Alexzandria (Alex) Elsea, MDOT passenger rail staff. Below, right: Marc Magliari, Amtrak Public Relations Manager

At the MARP meeting in Dearborn at the Amtrak Station on March 22, 2025, many new pieces of information were discussed. Attending the meeting were MDOT's Alexandria (Alex) Elsea, Nikki Johnston, and Amtrak's Marc Magliari, Senior Public Relations Manager.

Alex described her recent employment with MDOT as a Passenger Rail Analyst. She indicated that she was pleased to be in such an interesting position. Nikkie and Alex briefly reviewed MDOT's Service Development Planning efforts. MDOT applied to develop plans to increase reliability and double frequencies for all three of Michigan's existing passenger rail services through the Corridor Identification & Development Program. As a part of the Wolverine Service Development Plan, MDOT will be looking at extending up to two frequencies to connect to VIA Rail in Windsor.

The FRA's Corridor ID Program involves a three-step process to identify and develop projects required to implement new or improved services. Step 1 develops a scope, schedule and budget for the Service Development Plans and is 100% federally funded. Step 2 develops the plans with 90% federal funds. Step 3 completes preliminary engineering and environmental review for projects that are advanced from the plans with 80% federal funds. Each step requires separate contracts with FRA that follow the successful conclusion of the prior step. MDOT is currently completing Step 1 for these routes, which is expected to take about 9 months to complete.

Concurrently, MDOT is also studying a potential new Detroit-Lansing-Grand Rapids (Coast to Coast) service with the intent to apply under a future Corridor ID opportunity to complete any remaining work. MDOT is working with well-known consultant HNTB to complete Step 1. In addition, the Ohio Rail Development Commission is studying the development of a potential new Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit service under Corridor ID.

Amtrak, FRA, the freight railroads, and the Midwest states are completing an alternatives analysis for Chicago-area passenger rail access, including "South of the Lake". "South of the Lake" refers to a 45-mile portion of the corridor in Indiana and Illinois that is capacity restrained. This analysis will document points of common understanding and will offer a basis for the various Service Development Plans.

In other news, Marc announced that the Michigan City coaling tower will be removed this fall, necessitating busing passengers around the demolition site. The connection between CSX and Amtrak a mile east of New Buffalo is in the MDOT mill as a long range planned project. Several of the older P42 locomotives will be de-motorized and converted to "cabbage" cars, as was done with old F40 locomotives, to serve as cab cars. Finally, the New Orleans-Mobile trains should start running this summer. (The corrosion issues with the Horizon cars may affect this date.)

Much of the reaming time at the meeting was spent discussing the Venture cars, specifically the deployable steps and the hard seats that some people complain about. Apparently, the deployable steps had difficulties with winter ice. Concerning the seats, Marc provided some interesting new information on how these seats came to be hard. A few years ago, after Nippon Sharro could not meet the crash resistance specification with their car design, a long time was spent (fumbling?) before Nippon Sharro dropped out or was dropped from their contract to provide these cars. As the time limit on the funding was running out, Siemens offered to replace the cars with their own Venture cars design. Apparently, Siemens had to rush out to find a seating contractor to produce the seats

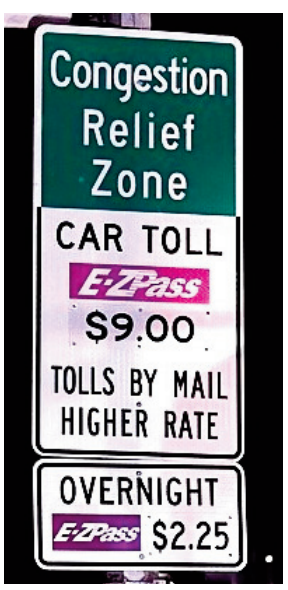
See ***MARP meets*** on page 8

SHORT LINES

Amtrak and real estate investment manager Rexmark settled their dispute on March 11-wherein Amtrak will take over the lease of the majority of the customer-facing area of Washington Union Station. According to an Amtrak press release, Amtrak wants to create a more welcoming environment for travelers and visitors. Amtrak is responsible for the day-to-day management and operation of the station and works in coordination with the FRA, the building owner, and Union Station Redevelopment Corporation, which leases the building from the FRA……...**Vermont officials say that years of work and millions spent on construction to extend Amtrak from Rutland to Burlington** are paying off, with ridership outpacing projections, according to a March report by *TV Station WCAX*. Ridership at Burlington increased by 4,000 between 2023 and 2024 to 25,033 passengers in 2024. Although slower than driving to Albany and New York City, passengers say it is still better than the nearly six-hour drive. "It's so quick just to walk down here and then you get to sit on a train, play some video games, take a nap, and it's so much easier," said Orion Roberts of Burlington……. **Caltrain electrification has resulted in big increases in ridership** on the regional rail line that links San Francisco with San Jose. According to *Ellis on the Rails*, in October, the first month of electrified service between San Francisco and San Jose, more than 753,000 people rode Caltrain, a 54 percent year-over-year increase. Sizable ridership gains have been reported for every subsequent month. Not only is Caltrain carrying more riders, but it is getting them to their destinations quicker thanks to the rapid acceleration of the EMU (electrical multiple unit) trainsets…….. **In early March CPKC's hydrogen locomotive CP1201, and its tender, became the first high-horsepower hydrogen unit** to be deployed for mainline service. According to *Progressive Railroading*, CP1201, which is based in Golden, British Columbia, completed its first refueling on March 6 at the new hydrogen station outside Alberta. CP1201 has resumed its runs in service as CPKC continues to test its performance in real world operating conditions……. **A private investor has come forward to support Dreamstar's proposed Los Angeles-San Francisco overnight sleeping car service.** According to an article in the *International Rail Journal* published on March 17, $100k in financial support was received from property investor Bill Lyon for securing track access agreements with Union Pacific. In March 2024 Dreamstar signed a memorandum of understanding with Union Pacific to operate on the Coast Line via Santa Barbara…….. **France wants to expand cross-border and domestic night train services.** According to articles in the *International Rail Journal* on January 29th and later in March, French National Railways relaunched two daily overnight services from Paris to Loudres and Briançon (in the French Alps) on December 12. The French government now says it is hoping to expand the overnight service further in the coming year and plans to offer journeys from France to cities across continental Europe and reintroduce 10 domestic overnight services by 2030. The government will invest "at least €800m" in 300 new coaches, 30 locomotives, and two workshops for delivery between 2025 and 2030. In March the French transport ministry published a notice informing potential bidders of its intention to tender next year an 8-year contract to operate five overnight trains…….**The President nominated Robert Gleason of Pennsylvania to serve a five-year term on the Amtrak board**, according to news published on March 24 by *Progressive Railroading.* Gleason, a former chair of Pennsylvania's Republican Party, has been an advocate for expanding passenger-rail service in Pennsylvania and he supported a proposed project to increase Amtrak service between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh. With this nomination Amtrak's board is filled, except for the vacant position for the Amtrak President. After President Stephen Gardner resigned on March 19, no names have surfaced for the position……..**Ohio's passenger rail plans got a big boost from the support of the 8,000 businesses represented** by the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, according to Stu Nicholson, RPA Board member. Testifying before the Ohio House Transportation Committee, the Chamber's Matt MacLaren, stated "the Chamber supports and encourages the funding for three corridors to advance into the second phase of study under the FRA Corridor ID Program." The corridors are Cleveland-Columbus-Dayton-Cincinnati; Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit; and the "Midwest Corridor", Chicago-Fort Wayne-Lima-Columbus-Pittsburgh. The testimony came at a hearing to support a bill that would have Ohio re-join the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission……. **The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's South Coast Rail service between Boston and two coastal cities started on March 24**, according to a report in *Progressive Railroading* on March 24. The new routes are Boston-Fall River and Boston-New Bedford, both upscale tourist communities. This is the first time in over 65 years that passenger trains have run on these routes.…. ….**A Market exists for expanded Michigan passenger rail, according to a column by Jack Lessenberry** in the *Toledo Blade* published on February 12, 2025. In talking to Nikki Johnson, MDOT Rail Development Manager, at the MARP meeting in Dearborn, Lessenberry was told that MDOT wants to double the number of trains on each of the three existing routes. But this might take ten years to implement. Lessenberry felt "sad" that the state that put the world on wheels (motorized anyway) couldn't act faster for trains……**PennDOT Secretary Mike Carroll says federal funding for the Amtrak Harrisburg-Pittsburgh second train is in question.** An article in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* on February 20 quoted Carroll saying on February 19, "I am going to believe that a discretionary grant that was provided during the last administration would be honored by the new administration," The $143 million discretionary grant from the Biden Administration was for start-up costs for the second train. But it apparently could be covered if the Feds honor a $500 million federal discretionary grant from Biden for replacement of a high profile I-83 bridge. The second grant could free up PennDOT funds to spread state money on other projects such as the second train…….**City leaders in Hamilton, Ohio, who have lobbied state and federal rail to bring passenger service to their city, now have support from Hamilton's First Financial Bank** according to *Mass Transit Online* and the *Hamilton Journal-News*. Dewayne Greenwood, First Financial Bank's Senior Business Specialist, said passenger rail with Amtrak "would be an amazing thing for this community, not only from a people standpoint, but an economic impact that it can have in this community over a period of time……..**Heartland Flyer at End of the Line?** David Peter Alan, in *Railway Age* on April 21 says that June 30, could mark the final run for Amtrak's Heartland Flyer. According to Texas Rail Advocates (TRA) President Peter Le Cody the yearly funding for the train was stripped out of the Texas legislative budget. The Flyer, in operation since 1999, carried more than 80,000 passengers last year and is a remnant of Santa Fe's Texas Chief. The TRA said: "Fighting to stay alive is not a new thing for the *Heartland Flyer*, which is a partnered service between the Texas and Oklahoma DOTs." The problem this time lies with difficulties getting the Lone Star State to pick up the $2.5 million a year cost. This is less than half of the operating costs of the train. Oklahoma covers the remaining cost.

Program is great success . . . at least for now

Congestion Relief Pricing Survives in NYC



MTA PHOTO

MTA PHOTO

Above, left: The last Congestion Relief Zone sign was installed on Broadway and West 62nd Street on January 4, 2025. At right, congestion relief on 7th Avenue. Congestion relief makes for a more walkable city. (MTA Photo)

AMC News reported on April 8 that New York City and the federal government came to an agreement on April 7 that would extend the life of congestion pricing in NYC at least until October. U.S. DOT Secretary Sean Duffy had previously made it clear through several letters to New York Governor Kathy Hochul and New York MTA officials that he wanted to end the tolling program in Manhattan by April 20. But, according to reports, the feds have agreed to keep the tolls going and the cameras rolling through at least October.

The extra 6 months allows congestion pricing to continue as a lawsuit plays out in the courts. Hochul, along with officials from the state-run MTA, filed a lawsuit in federal court to defy Duffy's order to cancel approval by the Biden Administration. USDOT officials said that "simple agreements" have "no bearing" on their position to end congestion pricing, which the agency called "an illegal form of class warfare." In response, the MTA and Governor Hochul insist that this is a sate matter and the federal government has no authority to stop it. The program had received final authorization during the Biden administration after years of federal review.

On April 13, *AM NewYork* reported that congestion pricing is achieving its goal of reducing congestion and producing the funds needed to make upgrades to the seriously deteriorated New York City transit system. Some facts from the MTA:

• During March an daily average of 560,405 vehicles entered the Central Business District (CBD) below 60th Street, down 13% from the historical average of 642,500 vehicles a day. Over the course of the entire month of March, the MTA said congestion pricing led to 2,544,945 fewer entries into the CBD.

• During February, an average of 541,409 vehicles entered the CBD daily, down from the historic average 613,900, translating to 2,029,748 fewer trips into the CBD.

• On April 1, the MTA reported a 7-day subway ridership average of 3,629,762 a day, an 8.6% increase from the corresponding 7-day ridership average of 3,341,522 in 2024.

• Except for New Year's Day, January 1, the 7-day ridership average on the subways has exceeded 3 million every day in 2025. That average has not been seen since before the COVID-19 pandemic struck New York City in 2020.

• Between April 1 and 10 of this year, the MTA further reported that daily subway ridership exceeded 4 million passengers six times.

• The Manhattan toll program provided $51.9 million in revenue during February. March figures will be discussed at the April 30 MTA board meeting.

• Including the $48.6 million in tolls garnered in January, congestion pricing raised $100.5 million in revenue during its first two months . This puts it on track to eclipse $620 million in revenue this calendar year.

• Of the $48.6 million billed to drivers in January, about 68 percent was charged to passenger cars. Another 9 percent was billed to commercial trucks, and 1 percent to buses and motorcycles. Roughly 22 percent of the tolling revenue came from taxis and for-hire vehicles, which are charged a smaller, per-trip fee that is added to the fare and paid by passengers.

• About 95 percent of the overall tolling revenue was charged at peak traffic times.

• The majority of drivers entering the Congestion Zone use E-ZPass, which deducts the toll automatically.

The MTA in a press release on February 19, said that Congestion Relief Zone toll revenue will fund $15 billion in capital improvements to the MTA network. The MTA will use the congestion pricing revenue to borrow significantly more money through municipal bonds, a common practice by governments to fund major projects.

When the program began in January 2025, it became the nation's first, following similar successful programs in London, Stockholm and Singapore. Congestion pricing in New York was approved in 2019 by state lawmakers after more than six decades (60 years!) of efforts to bring it to New York City streets. The 2019 law directs the MTA to spend 80% of the revenue, or $12 billion, on capital improvements to the subway and bus system, $1.5 billion on the Long Island RR, and $1.5 billion on Metro-North RR. Many subway improvement projects have been announced.

The MTA expects to collect an average of $40 million a month in the program's first phase and generate about $500 million per year during its first three years, $700 million per year after the first toll increase, and close to $1 billion a year after the next one, according to the MTA.

On February 21, Gov. Kathy Hochul met with Mr. Trump to defend the toll, armed with a 22-slide presentation showing that, in addition to the traffic benefits, commercial office leasing, Broadway attendance, and foot traffic in the tolling zone have climbed. Her presentation also cited a recent survey showing that a majority of frequent drivers into Manhattan support the toll. The revenue figures could further strengthen the agency's case to continue congestion pricing.

The tolling plan charges most passenger cars $9 a day to enter some of the most congested roads in Manhattan at peak traffic times. The tolls are expected to increase for most drivers to $12 in 2028, and to $15 in 2031.

The program has been assailed by critics who say that it punishes drivers from the boroughs and suburbs outside Manhattan who have limited and unreliable transit options, and shifts traffic and pollution to other parts of the city and region. They have called the program a money grab by a transit agency with a troubled financial history. In the weeks leading up to its start, the program survived multiple legal challenges from opponents, including the State of New Jersey.

"New Yorkers know the best way to get around is on mass transit and with congestion relief reducing cars on the road while increasing business, tens of thousands more riders are using subways and buses every day to get to restaurants, theaters, and wherever else they want to go," MTA Spokesperson Joana Flores said.

MARP meets

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quickly before the funding timed out and what we got was the hard seats. Reportedly the seats on the Venture cars used by Brightline and Via Rail have adequate padding. Questions to Marc about possibly designing a fix that would add padding to the seats during routine multi-year maintenance cycles, when the seats are removed for deep cleaning, was skillfully avoided. This would seem to be a possible solution. However, most of us are very pleased with the new Venture Cars, hard seats or soft.

Amtrak Reports Increased Ridership

Despite all the problems of cancelled trains, a critical lack of rolling stock, and service being not always up to snuff, Amtrak reported that ridership nationwide was up 15 percent in fiscal year 2024 (October 2023 to September 2024). The total was almost 33 million passengers, an all-time record. All the declines from the COVID pandemic have been surpassed.

The Washington-New York-Boston Northeast Corridor Acela and Regional trains carried 14 million passengers in FY 2024, a figure 15.9 percent higher than in 2023. Short distance state supported trains carried 14 million passengers in 2024, 15.8 percent more than in 2023. The 15 long distance trains carried 4 million passengers in 2024, 8 percent more than in 2023.

In Michigan, the news is not as positive. The three Michigan routes carried 695,000 riders compared to 675,000 in 2023, an increase of about 3 percent. This increase is far below the 15.8 percent average increase in 2024 for state supported trains nationally. Total ridership is also considerably less than the approximately 800,000 passengers carried annually before the COVID pandemic. Michigan suffers, as it always has, from not enough coaches on the trains, no added new trains, and cancelled trains due to winter and equipment break downs.